

Amendments to the Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A method of metering digital content having a message to be presented to users of a communications network, said method comprising:

embedding a code in said message, the embedded code containing a rate code for calculating a charge for presenting the message in the digital content;

detecting the embedded code;

based on the detected embedded code, counting the number of times the message is presented to ~~a~~the users of the communications network; and

calculating the charge based on the rate code and the counted number of times the message is presented to ~~a user~~the users of the communications network.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the communications network includes the Internet.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the message is presented in an image format to be implemented as a stream of image data contained in a network data stream and the code is embedded in the image data, said method further comprising:

monitoring the network data stream to detect the embedded code.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the code is embedded in a steganographic fashion.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the message is presented by a server, and wherein the embedded code contains a client identity associated with the digital content.

6. Canceled.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 , wherein the rate code includes a fixed rate.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 , wherein the rate code includes a variable rate based on the time and/or date of presenting the message to ~~a user~~the users of the communications network.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 , wherein the message is presented as an image on a display screen, and the image has a size relative to the display screen, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the image size.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 , wherein the communications network includes a plurality of destination domains, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the destination domain.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the message is an advertisement.

12-16. Canceled.

17. (Previously Presented) A metering system for a communications network having network data, the metering system adapted to count the number of times a message included in digital content is presented to users of the communications network, the message being contained in the network data in the form of a data stream embedded with a code, the data stream being conveyed to the network by a conveying means, said system comprising:

means, operatively connected to the conveying means, for monitoring the data stream in order to detect the embedded code;

means, operatively connected to the monitoring means, for counting a number of presentations to users based on the detected embedded code; and

a mechanism, remote from the monitoring means, for sending an authentication message to the monitoring means on a fixed time basis,

wherein the monitoring means is adapted to disable the counting means when the monitoring means does not receive the authentication message on the fixed time basis.

18. (Previously Presented) The metering system of claim 17, wherein the message is an advertisement.

19. (Previously Presented) The metering system of claim 17, further comprising a challenge-response mechanism, connected to the network, for causing the counting means to pause when the monitoring means is operatively disconnected from the conveying means.

20. Canceled.

21. (Original) The system of claim 18, further comprising a mechanism for metering a click-through process, wherein the user clicks on the message to learn more about the advertisement.

22. (Currently Amended) A method for metering digital content being presented to users of a communication network, the digital content being contained in a network data stream and including a message embedded with a code to allow a number of times the message is presented to ~~the users~~a user to be counted, the embedded code containing a rate code for calculating a charge to a client for presenting the message, said method comprising:

monitoring the network data stream to detect data representative of the embedded code;

recording a number of times the data representative of the embedded code is detected, the number of times the data representative of the embedded code is detected being indicative of presentation of the message to ~~the users~~a user; and

calculating a charge for presenting the message based on the rate code and the number of times the data representative of the embedded code is detected.

23. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 22, wherein the digital content includes an advertisement and the charge for presenting the message includes an advertisement charge.

24. Canceled.

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

debiting a client a monetary amount based on the calculated advertisement charge.

26. Canceled.

27. (Currently Amended) A method of metering digital content having a message to be presented to users of a communications network including the Internet, the message being presented in an image format implemented as a stream of image data contained in a network data stream, said image data having a code embedded therein, said method comprising:

monitoring the network data stream to detect the embedded code in the image data;

based on the detected embedded code, counting the number of times the message is presented to ~~a user~~the users of the communications network; and

calculating a charge based on the number of times the message is presented to ~~a user~~the users of the communications network.

28. Canceled.

29. Canceled.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein the code is embedded in a steganographic fashion.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein the message is presented by a server, and wherein the embedded code contains a client identity associated with a client responsible for paying the calculated charge for presenting the message in the digital content.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein the embedded code contains a rate code for calculating the charge for presenting the message in the digital content, said method further comprising:

calculating the charge based on the counted number of times and the rate code.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, wherein the rate code includes a fixed rate.

34. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 32, wherein the rate code includes a variable rate based on the time and/or date of presenting the message to ~~a user~~the users.

35. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, wherein the message is presented as an image on a display screen, and the image has a size relative to the display screen, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the image size.

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 32, wherein the communications network includes a plurality of destination domains, and wherein the rate code contains a charge rate based on the destination domain.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 27, wherein the message is an advertisement.

38. (Previously Presented) A metering system for a communications network having network data, the metering system adapted to count the number of times a message included in digital content is presented to users of the communications network, the message being contained in the network data in the form of a data stream embedded with a code, the data stream being conveyed to the network by a conveying means, said system comprising:

means, operatively connected to the conveying means, for monitoring the data stream in order to detect the embedded code;

means, operatively connected to the monitoring means, for counting number of presentations based on the detected embedded code;

means for calculating a charge based on the counted number of presentations;
and

a mechanism, remote from the monitoring means, for sending an authentication message to the monitoring means on a fixed time basis,

wherein the monitoring means is adapted to disable the counting means when the monitoring means does not receive the authentication message on the fixed time basis.

39. (Previously Presented) The metering system of claim 38, wherein the message is an advertisement.

40. (Previously Presented) The metering system of claim 38, further comprising a challenge-response mechanism, connected to the network, for causing the counting means to pause when the monitoring means is operatively disconnected from the conveying means.

41. Canceled.